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Congressman Christopher Shays  
May 22, 2006

**Statement of Congressman Christopher Shays  
On H.R. 3858 the Pet Evacuation Transportation Standards Act**

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. Shuster, Mr. Chandler, Mr. Young and Mr. Oberstar. I wanted to defer my opportunity to go before Mr. Lantos because it needs to be clear this began in the heart and mind of Mr. Lantos' wife, and we are merely instruments of her goodness.

I rise in support of H.R. 3858, the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, which we refer to as the PETS Act, which Congressman Lantos and I, as co-chairmen of the Friends of Animals Caucus, introduced.

This commonsense bill requires State and Local preparedness planners to include plans for evacuation of pet owners, pets, and service animals, as has already been described by previous speakers.

Hurricane Katrina left so many victims in its wake, including an estimated 600,000 animals that either lost their lives or were left without shelter. Hurricane Katrina taught us the hard lesson that we, as we prepare for future emergencies, it is important we incorporate pet owners and their pets in our plans.

Many pet owners had to choose between their safety and the safety of their pets, and anyone who owns a pet understands the difficult decisions that they had to make.

In order to qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency funding, a jurisdiction is required to submit a plan detailing their disaster preparedness plan. The PETS Act would simply require State and Local emergency preparedness authorities to plan for how they would accommodate household pets and service animals when presenting these plans to FEMA. Animals do not go before people, but animals will have a place in this plan.

The human horror and devastation in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama was a tragedy we are addressing, but it was also heartbreaking to hear stories of forcing evacuees to choose between being rescued or remaining with their pets.

This bipartisan legislation is necessary because when asked to choose between abandoning their pets or their personal safety, many pet owners chose to risk their lives and would continue today to risk their lives and remain with their pets. The plight of the animals left behind was truly tragic. This is not just an animal protection issue; this is a public safety issue. Roughly two-thirds of American households own pets. We need to ensure the pets and their pet owners are protected.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of this legislation. I, too, want to make reference to that young man; I guess he was around seven years old. I think of him and think this young man may have lost his home, he may have lost everything he owned, but he had his pet. As long as he had his pet, he could deal with it. To see this pet being grabbed from him, to me it was the height of cruelty that I still have a hard time understanding and appreciating.

When my mom and dad moved when I was eight or nine years old to another place, our pet dog, Mack, kept running back to the original house, and we lost him. For two years, I didn't have a pet, but I grew up with a pet. Then we moved to a new home and my parents could afford nothing else. They told me no Christmas presents. There would be no Christmas presents. My Christmas present was a new home, a brand new room, and I dealt with that. I thought, this year, no Christmas presents.

They were gone Christmas Eve day, and they came home to that night. They didn't tell me where they had been, which was very unusual. I was with my three older brothers. Then my parents asked me to come down into the garage. As I did, they were walking up holding a beautiful collie pup. That night I slept on the floor with lance, my collie pup.

I will never forget the joy I had. It was the best Christmas present I ever had, and it was just one little gift, a pet that remained in our household for years.

This is an important bill, and I urge its passage.